BRILLIANCY AND CHARM OF THE SUNNY LAND OF FRANCE

(By MISS LILLIAN MACON THOMPSON.)

Paris, August 25.—When last I wrote, we thought Paris held for us all anyone could know of beauty and delight, but the following two weeks having taken us out into the heart of France, through flowing field and countryside, amid palaces and chateaux, unrivalled in splendour, we realize that in Paris alone we could only begin to know a very small part of the beauty, the brilliancy and charm that like a gorgeous mantle enfolds this "Sunny Land of France."

Surely no country could be more typical of its people than is this one—so radiant, so brilliant, so gladsome and light of heart—with crimson poppie flaming from every waving field, with roses, nasturtiums and trailing geraniums spilling out of every window, and tumbling over every garden wall; and every hill-side and meadow a-gleam with the gold of buttercup, mustard, and cowslip, as though they bloomed a perpetual memorial to that great treaty of the field of the Cloth-of-Gold," when Francis I., Henry VIII., and Cardinal Wolsey, amid the pomp and pageantry of flaring trumpets and glittering retinue, pitched their silken tents and set their golden standards on that historic field between Ardres and Guisnes.

Everywhere, as though waiting to welcome you, the slender Lombardy poplars stand in long lines—little and straight—their silvery leaves fluttering in the breeze, their lissome bodies bending and beckoning before you in graceful, gracious French fashion, while around every red-roofed villa floats the shining flag of the white maple, signalling a truce to all care and anxiety, and bidding you form a speedy alliance with Mirth and Light-Heartedness, those reigning monarchs of fair France that no Revolution, no Communist uprising, and no disaster have ever succeeded in overthrowing.

The Presidential Home.

Our first outside trip was to Rambouillet—once the home of king and emperor, now the summer residence of the President of the French republic; and most fortunate we were in visiting it when we did, as President Poncaire takes up his residence there about the first of July, and then of course it is closed to all comers.

This chateau, the round towers of which were built by Francis I., was one of the favorite residences of that luxury loving monarch. In the surrounding forests, deer and wild boar abound in large number, and in the great banqueting hall in one wing of the building where the guests were wont to assemble for the hunt, are spreading antlers, great boars' tusks, and many trophies of the chase.

What a wonderful picture they must have made, those kings and queens of old France with their attendant lords and ladies, gathered there in all the glory of that splendid Renaissance period, awaiting the winding of the huntsman's horn to scatter them—a thousand sparkling points of light and color against the soft background of that rolling green country.

Successively Louis XIV., Louis XV., Louis XVI., Marie Antonette and Napoleon all lived at Rambouillet, and, indeed, as the numerous residences of each king are pointed out to you, you and yourself wonder how in one brief lifetime one man could have possibly covered so much territory and still found time for other things, and you feel that the life they led could have been but a little more enviable than that of a modern "knight of the grip" as he dashes madly from pillars to post.

What a boon our present day automobiles would have been to those roving monarchs as they laboriously traversed the country in those lumbering, golden coaches of theirs!

"Not Much of a Marriage."

At Rambouillet we were shown the bed in which Charles IX. slept the night before he signed his abdication; the dainty white and gold boudoir of Marie Antoinette and the little private chapel of Louis XIV., in which it is claimed he and Madame de Maintenon were secretly married—calling forth the remark as seen from the nineteen-year-old point of view of a young girl standing by: "My,, but they couldn't have had very much of a wedding!" As though it would hardly profit a woman to marry even a king of France if all the world were not by to see and applaud!

Here also is the famous Cypress Avenue, and most beautiful it is with the sunlight sifting through its feathery branches interlaced over-head—a perfect setting for those lords and chevaliers of long ago, in silken hose and embroidered doublet, with sweeping plumes and jewelled swords, bowing low before those delicate, high-bred beauties of old France as they loitered down the dim reaches of this shadowy sun-slecked pathway—a veritable "road to memory," down which still walk before you radiant in youth and beauty, fair Diane of Portiers, whose charm enslaved two kings, Margaret, Duchess d'Alencon, the radiant "Pearl of Valois"; Lousse de la Valliere, young and trusting; brilliant and arrogant de Montespau, De Mamtenou, selfish and ambitious, Marie Antoinette, happy and light-hearted, with no shadow of the dark days before her clouding her young brow—and all those rare and radiant creatures the store of whose wit and beauty, triumphs and defeats, joys and heartaches still resound through the annals of old court days in France.

Glamour of Dead Days.

If, as prophetic ones believe, and, as the dream of universal brotherhood demands, all monarchies shall one day perish from the earch, why, oh, why, we find ourselves asking, could not France have been the last to have been stripped of the glamour that surrounds monarchial institutions! What people were ever so suited to adorn such a life! Their scintillating wit; their gracious adaptability; their love of color of light, and of effect—how it all blends into such a setting! Even our democratic hearts yearn over the splendour of those departed days, and sigh to think that against the resplendent background that only their artists, luxury-loving souls knew how to create, no longer walk in stately presence, king and courtier, queen and cavalier, lord and lady, and beauty of high degree.

Looking down the green vista of this far-famed Cypress Avenue, I could but be reminded of a similar one nearer home, and even more beautiful—that lovely walk in Salem, North Carolina, known as Cedar Avenue, bordering that peaceful God's Acre where the Moravians of that quaint old town bury their dead.

A widely travelled friend once told me that in all his journeyings about the world, he had yet to see anything of its kind so beautiful as this Cedar Avenue in Salem—comparing it at the time to this one at Rambouillet—saying that the former was much longer and had the advantage of the contrast of the dark green of the cedars against the emerald green of the grass on each side of it, but, so hard is it for us to believe that the best things in life often ever lies nearest at hand, that I had to stand in the actual shadow of this more famous one before I could accept his estimate as a true one.

Go To Salem.

So when next the wanderlust seizes you, and a longing to see one of the great sights of the world possesses you, instead of turning your eyes in vain longing toward distant goals, just get on the train and go to Salem, North Carolina, and if you will choose as the time of your going, the Easter season, when in the early dawn of Easter Sunday the great throng gathers in front of the Moravian church there to hear Bishop Rondthaler's glad greeting, "The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!" and from there wend your way with the assembled throng down this same Cedar Avenue, as it echoes and re-echoes with the stately music of those grand old German chorals, proclaiming the resurrection morn, I think I can safely promise you that though you search the world over you will nowhere see or experience anything more beautiful or uplifting.

From Rambouillet we drove a distance of six miles to the Chateau de Mainteoun—the smooth white road we followed taking us for miles under an avenue of slender acacias trees—some pink, some white—shaking their perfumed clusters above us; past meadows of wondrously wrought mosaic of primrose, cowslip and avemone; by fields of oats and barley, with the scarlet poppies rioting through them like a great conflagration, until as the wind swept over them you half-expected to see the whole countryside go up in a blaze of crimson glory.

This Chateau was presented to Madame de Maintenon by Louis XIV., and is now the property of the Duc de Noailles, a descendant of that little neice of Madame de Maintenon, who is seen kneeling by her side in that most famous portrait of that celebrated woman.

The place is of unusual historic interest except that which attaches to it as the home of the brilliant woman who became the third wife of Louis XIV., but the gardens are very beautiful, with turrets and battlements of chateau and spires of neighboring villages reflected in the silver Eure from which stream it was Louis' intention to convey water to Versailles through the magnificent aqueduct that he started but never completed—the lofty arches of which, as seen through a long vista of fringing willows and tufted elms, form a lovely frame for the field and river stretching out beyond it.

We had had our lunch on the roadside coming over, and after tea in a quaint little inn outside the chateau walls, we drove back by another route, through quaint medieval villages—each humble cottage bright with its little garden plot, great rose trees growing roof high against the stone walls, and clustering bunches of purple grapes framing the low doorways, while occasional poppies, cornflower and mustard nodded us a friendly welcome from picturesque thatched roofs, where vagrant seed had blown and blossomed.

Farewell To Paris.

With a taste of this out-of-door life among park and chateaux, we soon turned our fickle backs on Paris and the next week found us one day at St. Cloud, another of Chantelly; another and thus on through the week to Malmaison, Versailles, and Fontainbleau, and even after all this, grasping enough to sigh regretfully over the thought that our time would not permit us a longer stay in France, so that we might take in a four days coaching trip through this chateau country of Southern France, which the Student Hostel was planning for the following week.

The trip to St. Cloud we took by water, passing under the many stately bridges of the Seine, by picturesque villas running down to the water's edge, under the shadow of forest-crowned hills from which convent and monastery frowned grimly down upon you.

The palace at St. Cloud was destroyed by the Communists in 1871, but as you walk along the wooded uplands overlooking the Seine through terraced and balustrated gardens that look toward long vistas through elms and silvery beeches many centuries old, it takes but a slight stretch of the imagination to reconstruct it all as it once rose there.

Below the height of St. Cloud nestles the little village of Sevres, where the world-famed Sevres porcelian is manufactured, and where we had the delight of spending an hour or so among the priceless treasures of the great museum there.

At Chantilly, an estate of over six thousand acres—once the home of the illustrious Conde family, we spent most of the day driving through the great forest, where from a central point, twelve avenues cut through the heart of the forest, radiate like the spokes of a wheel in a dozen different directions—each avenue so long that standing at one end and looking through to the other, the entrance, which is as high as the lofty trees that arch overhead, seem only a low archway no higher than a man's head.

Chantelly is also famous as a great race course, it being to France what Newmarket is to England.

At The Big Race.

We were disappointed to learn that the June races had just taken place the week before we arrived in Paris, but the crowning event of the racing season, the Grand Prix at Longchamps was yet ahead of us, and this we determined to see—the very thought of attending the races in Paris keeping us on the qui vive for the entire week.

We knew nothing, however, of the entries for the races, and feared with the meagre French at our command to attempt the hazardous task of buying our tickets and securing desirable seats in the midst of that turbulent, excited crowd, so as the brilliant, fashionable throng was what we really wished to see—the gowns and jewels of the women—the latest fads and fancies of fashion—in fact all that animation, color and brilliancy that go to make up the vivid scene of a race day in Paris, we compromised by deciding to get a cab for the afternoon, station ourselves at a point of vantage where the elegantes emerged, and afterwards drive in the Bois de Bonlogne where we would see all the fashionable, gorgeously attired throng as they drove and had tea in the exclusive open-air restaurants there.

A French-speaking friend drove the bargain, and gave instructions to our Jehu according to the above mapped out program, whereupon we blithely set forth, three of us in a victoria of the deep-sea-going variety, drawn by a would-be-frolicsome steed with the tragic air of a woman who having out-lived her youth and beauty is yet unconscious of it, the whole presided over by a coachman in livery far too resplendent for the rest of his equippage.

"Poor But Genteel."

If ever you saw "poor but genteel" written over anything it was written over that "turn-out"! But we refused to let it quench the buoyancy of our spirits. Were we not off for the races in Paris, and did not such an occasion call for brilliancy and bouyancy! Should we let such a trivial matter as the fact of our not being able to go out in our own Mercedes throw a shadow over such a rare event. Indeed no! We were made of sterner stuff we hoped! So setting our new Parisian hats at a little jauntier angle, and adjusting our new Parisian ruches so as to give a truly "chic" effect, off we set—if not altogether as elegant as the most elegant, certainly as gay as the gayest!

Our coachman was as guiltless of any knowledge of a single word in the English vocabulary as we were of any word in the French language that could be pronounced so a Frenchman could understand it, and he might easily have driven us to the morgue and treated us to an afternoon among the ghostly sights there, for all it was in our power to make him understand that our inclinations were along other lines, but fortunately for us, he seemed to have fully comprehended his instructions, and at first all went "merry as a marriage bell."

We drove through the Bois to the Longchaps race course, and there drew up at an alluring place where for a few minutes we sniffed the air surrounding broughams and motors emblazoned with crests and coats-of-arms, fitted out in minute detail as perfectly as milady's boudoir could be from fragrant flowers in vases of gold and silver, to crested note-paper and perfume bottles with jewel-wrought monograms interwoven in their mountings.

A Democracy of Dilapidation.

But a true sportsman was our Jehu! No hanger-on to the skirts of the idle rich was he. No frivolous devotee of fashion's follies—but one who came to the races to see the races, and, just as we were settling back to revel in our luxurious surroundings, without bestowing look or word on us, but doubtless harboring in his heart a secret contempt for our grovelling spirit that sought to hang on to the fringe of a society in which we did not naturally move—off he drove from these Elysian fields of fashion and elegance, only to draw up in the midst of taxis and victorias as humble and dilapidated as our own.

Now what can be more galling to soaring ambition than to find itself in its own class? "What came we out for to see?"

Not people in our own circumstance of life, surely, who dressed as we did and ignominiously rode in hired cabs as we did. No, indeed! We were "looking up in this world" and would brook no back-set.

All these thoughts indignantly surged in our rebellious hearts—but how communicate them to our driver? Indeed, how communicate with him at all? We might as well have been deaf and dumb for all the good the gift of speech could do us on this occasion!

Where we sat in this suffocating atmosphere of bourgeois gentility, with rapt eyes on the red and orange caps of the jockeys as they flashed around the track.

That Precarious French.

We held earnest consultation, carefully constrated a French sentence in our "best style"—the same being to the effect that it was not the actual racing that we wished to see, but the toilettes de la grande dames," and would he please, (we were so glad to be able to work in the familiar "sevous plais," at least sure of that), drive to the first place at which we were stationed, as the crowd would soon be coming out and we would miss the very thing we came out to see.

This done—even though faultily—but at least so our intent and purpose would be made plain we felt, the question then arose as to how we were to attract his attention.

The only mode of address known to us was "garcon," this having been the "title by which we learned to hail the waiters on our trip over on the Rochambeau, but that seemed much too flippant and juvenile a title to use in addressing a dignified creature of full fifty-five summers, arrayed in full regalia of silk hat and frock coat. Our courage failed us. The suggestion was then offered that a gentle tug on the button on the back of his coat might bring him out of the trance in which he seemed steeped, and the latter course being decided upon as the most tactful mode of gaining his attention, we applied ourselves to it accordingly, finding to our delight that it worked with all the expediency of its electric substitute when pressed in similar emergencies.

Having previously, in an evil vainglorious moment boasted of my "accent," which no one else seemed to have observed, I was maliciously (in order that my ignomy might be encompassed before their very eyes) appointed spokesman for the crowd, and so, carefully and deliberately, with what seemed to me faultless diction and accent, with all the dignity of President Wilson before assembled Congress, I delivered my message—it not being received, however, I regret to state, with the same degree of enthusiasm that marked the effort of the illustrious dignitary to whom, in the boldness of expected success, I had the effrontery to compare my own humble stye.

Beaten In Talking Match.

Perplexity and amazement stole upon his brow, a volley of voluble and incomprehensible French smote our terrified ears; in vast panic and excitement we jabbered a reply; with hopeless despair he replied in kind, and at last, the situation growing more complicated and acute each minute, with despairing "Je ne comprenez pas," accompanied by expressive shrugging of the shoulders and waving of hands, he calmly reseated himself on the height above us and addressed himself to the real issue involved, namely, the outcome of the races, while there we sat, frivoling away a precious three dollars for the privilege of reposing in rigid respectability in an atmosphere of hired cabs as commonplace and plebean as our own.

And thus our dream of a dazzling day at the races!

It was not to be endured!

Again we "pressed the button," endeavored emphatically to explain that we found ourselves amid utterly uncongenial surroundings—in other words that we wished to move only in the most exclusve circles, and desired to be removed at once from the lowly atmosphere in which he had blunderingly placed us!

But evidently he did not think us fitted to shine to that exalted circle toward which our souls yearned, for in

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